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HEALTH & SCIENCE

COVID after five years

By **PAUL ERICSON** | February 13, 2025

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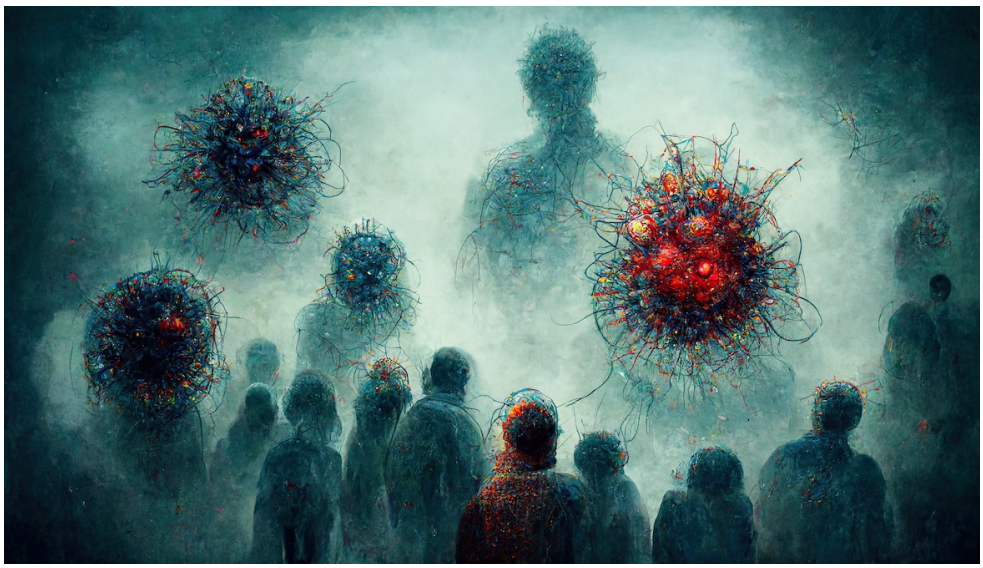

Five years ago Tuesday, the World Health Organization announced the official name for the novel coronavirus that had emerged in China and was rapidly making its way around the globe: COVID-19.

The SARS-CoV-2 virus, which spread with a speed and ferocity that few had imagined possible, soon became the worst public health crisis in nearly a century.

Confirmed COVID deaths worldwide have now surpassed 7 million, with more than 1.2 million recorded in the U.S. In the six-county Rochester metropolitan area, the total is more than 3,350, with 2,672 in Monroe County. Those figures are dwarfed by the number of people sickened by the virus, some of whom have suffered long-term effects. And they do not begin to measure the pandemic's economic and social toll—lost jobs and wages, educational disruption, heightened political polarization and more.

In early May 2023, the WHO decided (https://www.who.int/news/item/05-05-2023-statement-on-the-fifteenth-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-(2005)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)-pandemic) that COVID "no longer constitutes a public health emergency of international concern" and the U.S. COVID-19 Public Health Emergency Declaration (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/end-of-phe.html) ended. In a number of ways, everyday life today has returned to how it was before the pandemic.

Yet COVID is still with us—the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports (https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#trends_weeklydeaths_7dayeddiagnosed_00) 398 weekly deaths as of Feb. 1. And for many people who lived through the pandemic, the experience had a profound and lasting effect.

To help assess COVID's impact at the five-year mark, the Rochester Beacon conducted a reader survey this week. Those who took part used words like "uncertainty," "fear" and "isolation" to describe their memories of the pandemic, especially its first days and weeks.

"The social isolation and the fear of contagion," recalled Sandy Mayer M.D.

"I remember that it deprived us of the thing that we turn to in times of grief, the comfort of human contact," JoAnn Beck wrote.

And Emily Love noted: "I remember the fear and uncertainty, and for a brief period of time, the genuine compassion and collaboration between people on a scale I have never witnessed before. Unfortunately, that fleeting spirit of working together to keep each other safe and healthy has been long gone for years now."

When the pandemic struck

The CDC reported the first laboratory-confirmed case of the "2019 novel coronavirus" on Jan. 20, 2020; the first recorded instance of person-to-person spread in this country came 10 days later. On Feb. 6, a U.S. death from the virus was reported.

The first COVID-19 case in Monroe County (https://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2020/03/11/coronavirus-rochester-ny-first-area-infection-reported-more-expected-covid-19/4939448002/) came on March 11, the same day that the WHO declared a global pandemic; news of the county's first death (https://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2020/03/17/rochester-coronavirus-first-death-monroe-county-ny-update-rochester-general-hospital/5063725002/) attributed to COVID arrived on March 17. Three days later, then Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced a stay-at-home mandate (https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-signs-new-york-state-pause-executive-order) requiring all non-essential businesses to close.

Despite the efforts to contain the disease, COVID's toll mounted at a breathtaking pace. By early April, the U.S. had recorded 246,000 cases, with 6,000 deaths. In Monroe County, there were 390 confirmed cases and 10 deaths. Three weeks later, the U.S. death toll reached 50,000, nearly as high as the number of U.S. lives taken during the Vietnam War, and by Memorial Day, it surpassed 100,000—far higher than in any other nation in the world (https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/world/coronavirus-maps.html).

"As a physician, I was involved with the community response as well as the Rochester regional health system," recalled Jeffrey Allen. "Although there was NO prior experience with this type of unprecedented global medical situation I was extremely impressed with the professionalism and dedication to addressing this mammoth issue."

By autumn 2020, even as the virus continued its rampage, pandemic fatigue had begun to set in. President Donald Trump said (https://www.politico.com/news/2020/10/19/fauci-trump-wearing-mask-weakness-430114) that "people are tired of COVID. People are saying, 'Whatever, just leave us alone.' People are tired of hearing (Anthony) Fauci and all these idiots."

As Trump left office a few months later, the U.S. death toll reached 400,000 (https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/us/coronavirus-deaths-usa-400000.html) ; and by the anniversary of first U.S. COVID death (https://www.npr.org/2021/02/06/964764236/a-year-since-first-u-s-death-covid-19-has-exacted-a-heavy-toll) , that number had climbed to 459,361 with more than 26.8 million reported cases.

More than one in five Beacon survey respondents—22 percent—said they lost a family member or friend to COVID.

In the pandemic's initial period, fear of the disease was mixed with concern about the economic fallout. When the first national monthly jobs numbers (https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm) since the pandemic hit were released early May 2020, they showed more than 20.5 million jobs were shed the previous month, and the unemployment rate jumped to 14.7 percent—the worst since the Great Depression (https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/05/08/business/economy/april-jobs-report.html) .

In the Rochester region, total nonfarm employment in April 2020 was down by more than 93,000 jobs, or 17.3 percent, compared with December 2019.

Kenneth Rogoff, a Rochester native and renowned economist, wrote (https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/mapping-covid19-global-recession-worst-in-150-years-by-kenneth-rogoff-2020-04) that "with each passing day, the 2008 global financial crisis increasingly looks like a mere dry run for today's economic catastrophe." His view was shared by many economic experts.

By summer 2020, however, the economy's rebound was clearly underway, in part because many businesses here and elsewhere were able to quickly and effectively switch to remote work (https://rochesterbeacon.com/2020/05/14/business-goes-remote/) . By June 2022, the nation had recovered all of the jobs lost when COVID struck. The Rochester region is still inching its way back, though. In December 2024, total nonfarm employment (https://dol.ny.gov/current-employment-statistics-0) had reached 544,000—still not quite a full recovery to the 544,800 jobs reported here in December 2019.

Changed lives

When asked if the pandemic changed how they lived their lives compared to before COVID, 76 percent of Beacon survey respondents answered "yes." Ninety-eight percent said they have been vaccinated for COVID and 83 percent said they continue to get the latest booster vaccines; many continue to use masks, avoid crowds, and socialize less.

“I continue to wear a mask, though not as often. I don’t like big groups of people anymore,” wrote Ruth Yanoff.

“The pandemic violently shattered my life and that of my family,” Emily Love noted. “I now homeschool my children because I refuse to accept constant illness as normal, we have not stopped masking around others and avoid unnecessary indoor activities.”

However, Love added, “my family has closer relationships, healthy bodies and minds, and an active Still-Coviding community that fills us with friends and laughter. So in many ways, we are thriving more now than before.”

Robyn Carter also saw a positive impact: “The pandemic profoundly reshaped my perspective on life, instilling a greater sense of purpose and urgency. … I prioritize experiences that bring me joy, travel more frequently, and make a conscious effort to check in with friends and loved ones just to say I love you or appreciate you.”

Future pandemics

The final question in the Beacon survey asked: “How confident are you that the U.S. public health system is prepared for a future pandemic?” For many, the experience of the last five years has given them reason to worry. Seventy-nine percent said they were not very or not at all confident—and no one answered “very confident.”

“The current federal administration’s anti-government, anti-tax, and anti-science beliefs will severely damage the already inadequate public health system,” believes Peter Collinge.

Christine Farnum is concerned about how the U.S. will address the H5N1 bird flu that is now widespread in wild birds globally and is causing outbreaks in poultry and U.S. dairy cows with several recent cases among dairy and poultry workers reported.

“There has been little response to bird flu,” she wrote. “And our country is so divided. The pandemic has been politicized, people question science, and people became tired of precautions.”

David Powe thinks “our public health system learned a lot during the pandemic,” but added that he is concerned “politics and bureaucracy will limit what we do with that knowledge.”

Reflecting on the lives lost

In an August 2023 interview (https://rochesterbeacon.com/2023/08/10/we-had-people-die-that-didnt-have-to-die/) with the Beacon, Michael Mendoza M.D., who was on the front lines as Monroe County’s commissioner of public health, shared his own memories of COVID’s onslaught.

“It was very much a surreal thing,” he said. “We practice and we have plans. And we talk about these things in sort of the hypothetical sense. But when it becomes reality, that’s when you think, ‘Wow, this is here.’”

He also said, “Do I have regrets about how we approached things? No, we were dealing with a lot of uncertainty.”

But later, reflecting on the number of people who lost their lives, he spoke about what might have been with a different U.S. response to the pandemic.

“It didn’t have to be that way. It didn’t have to be that way,” he said. “We could have

prevented so many of those deaths."

More than a few participants in this week's survey echoed Mendoza. As one wrote looking back: "Being surprised, over and over, at the number of people who were opposed to using masks in public, getting vaccinated, and generally following public health advice AND then how so many of our leaders responded by accommodating these anti-science views even as thousands died."

Patients at University of Rochester Medical Center's Manhattan Square Family Clinic in downtown Rochester received their first dose of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine Jan. 15, 2021. | Photo by J. Adam Fenster / University of Rochester

In this week's Beacon survey, conducted Tuesday, 130 readers participated. The following are signed written comments of survey respondents. Many additional unsigned responses were submitted. As a matter of policy, the Beacon does not post unsigned comments.

What do you remember most about living through the COVID pandemic?

I sewed so many masks from cloth, with fabric ties and bent wire nose pieces. Eventually they went into a box when the guidance evolved to advise N95 and KN95 masks were better. We followed the latest science, to reduce our risk. And we didn't get COVID for years, until rates were down, we got vaccinated, and stopped wearing masks.
—Christine Farnum

Wiping down groceries, mail, doorknobs. Limiting the number of people in the grocery store where I lived. A homemade cloth mask made by a friend (that wouldn't have protected anyone from anything, so really a desperation thing). Giving up my volunteer gig, which was driving seniors to appointments, supermarkets, etc., and frankly, I'm still not sure I want to have people in my car again.

—Ruth Yanoff

One memorable event was hosting Thanksgiving dinner in 2020 for a couple who drove in from Syracuse. We wore ski clothing and sat on our open porch with heated blankets—6 feet apart, of course. We had separate serving dishes and utensils for each couple, and wore masks and plastic gloves as much as possible. Mercifully, the outdoor temp was in the 50s, so we weren't too cold—except for our hands. It's difficult to handle food and utensils with gloved hands.
—Rose Ericson

As a physician, I was involved with the community response as well as the Rochester regional health system. Although there was NO prior experience with this type of unprecedented global medical situation I was extremely impressed with the professionalism and dedication to addressing this mammoth issue. 24/7 and never a complaint. I saw patient and providers with endless courage and patience to care for all! We have wonderful health care and public health teams in our community!
—Jeffrey Allen

Struggling against isolation, and frustration watching the administration in Washington politicize what should have been a straightforward public health response.
—Kathy Lewis

I remember the fear and uncertainty, and for a brief period of time, the genuine compassion and collaboration between people on a scale I have never witnessed before. Unfortunately, that fleeting spirit of working together to keep each other safe and healthy has been long gone for years now.
—Emily Love

The social isolation and the fear of contagion.
—Sandy Mayer MD

Millions of people who were diagnosed with COVID-19 died and their death would be soon forgotten.
—Dennis P. Francione

We only saw our adult kids walking the dogs in a park, separated by several feet. We opened our mail outside and let it sit for a couple of days. We ate the same things over and over as we had those staples in the house and didn't have to spend much time grocery shopping. I got to work from home full time for a year. THAT was the only good thing about the pandemic.
—Sarah Johnstone

Empty highways. Public divisions. Unnecessary deaths.
—Lynn Braband

I remember that it deprived us of the thing that we turn to in times of grief, the comfort of human contact.
—JoAnn Beck

I spent months on the road in 2020 living in a hotel and driving 10+ hours each way to avoid flying. I had to keep going and it broke me in many ways. What became obvious was that there was a major disconnect that started to spread with the lack of information. Impatience became fury followed by distrust when predictions didn't go exactly to plan and decisions that were based on the information we had at the time have been re-assessed and treated as malice instead of people doing their best during a crisis.
—Chris Lindstrom

How completely incompetent the Trump Administration was at all levels. Having complete faith in Dr. Fauci, the images of trailers full of dead bodies, the nursing home fiasco. The global health community's complete lack of preparedness and planning. This was worse than 9/11. Kids are staying home, businesses are closing, and there is a lack of PPE, respirators, and disinfection equipment.
—Frank Orienter

Grocery shopping for my 100 year old mother—leaving the groceries outside the storm door, but able to see her!
—Nancy Brown

N95 masks and regular Zoom sessions with our kids and grandkids.
—Tom Moughan

One of the most striking memories I have of that time is the pervasive sense of fear within our home. Three generations lived together in a small space, each with differing perspectives on COVID-19. The youngest members longed for social interaction, despite CDC recommendations to limit contact, as their mental well-being depended on peer engagement. As a healthcare professional, I was constantly worried about the risk of exposing our 90-year-old grandmother to the virus. However, she resisted strict precautions, believing that if it was her time to go, so be it. I feared that if one of the grandchildren unknowingly transmitted the virus to her, they would carry the emotional burden of that loss. It was an incredibly uncertain and challenging time.
—Robyn Carter

The uncertainty and misinformation during those times.
—Mark Sutter

Lack of coordinated response, disparaging of Dr. Fauci and irrational guidance from the president.
—Paul H. Bush

My memories of the pandemic are laced with all the creative things people did to reach out to one another, share their special talents, and maintain a sense of community. A friend all the way in Big Sur, California, put together a Facebook group she called “The COVID Chopped Challenge.” Every two weeks, she’d come up with an ingredient we should all use to create a great meal. We would all post photos, videos, and descriptions of what we’d done, and she’d choose a winner based on our overall creativity. We had fun with this for a solid six months! I am so grateful to her for being such a bright spot in such a dark time.
—Randi Minetor, Rochester

What I remember most is the mass hysteria and the amount of false information that was disseminated.
—B Hutchings

We were in SC when the news had a sense of urgency. We packed up and drove home. Hotels were closed or empty. At several restaurants we had to order and then eat in the car. It was like living in a sci-fi film.
—Barbara Quinn

Disruption of medical services as my hip replacement was delayed as elective, and gratefully rescheduled four months later just before I was nearly fully incapacitated. New appreciation for all medical advances.
—David Ross

That too many people weren’t willing to help protect others.
—Miriam Rudnick

So many people refusing the vaccine, getting ill and spending several weeks in the hospital.
—David Terp

As the executive director of a nonprofit w/ a coffee and food business, how to keep workers safe and protect them economically.
—Joy Bergfalk

I remember liking being home even though it was forced. I did more gardening, worked on the house, and read books I had meant to read. I also remember having COVID-19 in March 2020 and there were no resources for testing in this area. I felt helpless.

—Molly Snyder

At the start of Covid I read about the possibility of food shortages, so I began buying extras of canned and other nonperishable goods. Today they fill half of a spare room.
—Karen Beadling

I remember the isolation of having to be quarantined. Also, the tragic loss of life, particularly among the elderly.
—Stephen L Gaudioso

Switching from in-office to work from home mode; picking up my daughter from college as it went into a lockdown.
—Daniel Mix

Public fear that caused a herd mentality and an all too ready willingness of people to surrender the right to question “the science” or our leaders.
—Roy Allen

I remember intense concern for the elders in my life, and an intense fear that my family in and around NYC would be taken.
—Stephanie LaScala-Lodato

How it was a literal ghost town.
—Sue Zornow

The social isolation.
—Rick P. Teller

The lack of effective leadership and poor communication. The government and health care system were seriously unprepared for a disaster of this magnitude. The lack of trust in those in charge as well as the ignorance and utter stupidity of some people has prolonged this pandemic to the present day.
—Jim Gaden

Fear of the unknown and just how serious was this pandemic at the beginning. Work habits changed … some in office had option to work from home and those in office were spaced apart.
—Rich Byers

I remember my innate and immediate response of taking charge of my surroundings and family. Organizing our lives for a long-haul disruption, securing groceries, sewing masks, organizing and sharing with friends for daily supplies, reading voraciously the latest news, medical and research advice, etc. I also remember the massive disparities between the “haves” and the “have-nots,” be it, those who were able to keep their jobs and work from home; those who could control their environment; be it the coming and goings in their home, having a yard to decompress in, or their work place; the difference of having school aged children or not; the difference between those who had the resources—transportation, money, mobility, internet—vs those who did not. I think people’s experience of the COVID pandemic was wildly varied and we don’t always appreciate that fact.
—Monique Patenaude

Being sequestered.
—Ned Corman

The isolation. I live alone and didn’t touch another human being for nine months. I also remember how quiet the world was. How the earth began to heal without all the planes flying and automobiles driving. Not all of it was bad.
—Rev. Rebecca Segers

I remember that the pandemic is still going on. I remember people gleefully putting aside protocols to go back to “normal” even though the disease still ravages people.
—Jessica Olin

I watched or heard what was happening on TV. I remember hearing how many elderly people needed respirators and there were not enough. I remember how quicky Covid was spreading. I remember some businesses closing. My husband and I went to our son's wedding. My husband got a mild case first and then I got a mild case but not diagnosed so it could have been something else.
—Ellen Lerner

Fear of being infected or of infecting others.
—Konrad Emmert

What I remember most about living through Covid was … LIVING through Covid.
—Len Sheldon

Uncertainty about the character of the disease, and political fighting or the government response.
—Bill Perkins

The lack of social contact.
—Ellen Cara Lewis

Did the pandemic change how you live your life?

The pandemic forced me to adopt new technologies and practices to continue life and business while reducing the risk of spreading the virus. Many of these practices have improved my life today. However, the isolation from the community was traumatic.
—David Powe

Having all outside commitments cease acted as a reset of my sense of how busy/active/committed I want to be outside of work. I do fewer things now. My spouse and I continue to take neighborhood walks together, which started during the pandemic (when gyms/pools closed). And we still wear masks in airports and on airplanes, and sometimes in supermarkets or other crowded places when illness rates are high.
—Christine Farnum

I continue to wear a mask, though not as often. I don't like big groups of people anymore. I have a rigid schedule for vaccines, Covid and others. I'm not eager to fly, so I'm missing seeing some friends.
—Ruth Yanoff

I always wear a mask on planes and in crowded places, like concerts. And, two weeks before an important event, I wear a mask everywhere. I've stepped up my already-liberal use of hand sanitizer. The great news is that, in those five years, I've been a LOT healthier than before Covid; I've gotten only one significant cold/flu and one case of Covid.
—Rose Ericson

We are extremely alert to current and future global and community health as well as the adversarial political climate—very tough to navigate these issues and care for patient.
—Jeffrey Allen

I spend more time by myself—different habits formed during the pandemic years.
—Kathy Lewis

The pandemic violently shattered my life and that of my family. I now homeschool my children because I refuse to accept constant illness as normal, we have not stopped masking around others and avoid unnecessary indoor activities. There is almost nothing the same now. However, my family has closer relationships, healthy bodies and minds, and an active Still-Coviding community that fills us with friends and laughter. So in many ways, we are thriving more now than before.
—Emily Love

I'm back to my pre-pandemic lifestyle at this point except I still wear a mask when I work at the hospital.
—Sandy Mayer MD

I placed my trust in medical science knowing there would be a remedy to fight the infection. No one should poke fun at our scientists and doctors.
—Dennis P. Francione

I continue to wash my hands frequently and wear a mask if I'm around a crowd. I eventually reevaluated and decided to retire at 67 instead of plugging away for a couple more years.
—Sarah Johnstone

I used to believe that I could trust the CDC to prioritize the physical well being of the population over economic or political interests and now I feel that I'm on my own. On my own to interpret data, on my own to mitigate risks. I evaluate transmission risks for any event that I go to based on how many people and how much airflow I expect. (For example: even masked, I can't justify going out dancing at an indoor club, but I will go to less crowded or outdoor concerts.)
—Maria Evans

Wearing masks in certain situations (when) crowded. Hesitant to share my views with others.
—Lynn Braband

It ended up being a catalyst for change in my life. A group of my friends and I started working with small, minority-owned restaurants to do our part. That got me more engaged in the community trying to grow my passions into projects that are a win for everyone involved instead of just the people at the top. For myself, for our members, and for the community as a whole.
—Chris Lindstrom

My wife now does all our shopping remotely. We don't go out as much, and most importantly, we get every vaccination available as quickly as possible. I'm more cynical about politicians and their ability to prioritize funding for preparing for any potential catastrophe and its aftermath. I'm also frightened that the new federal administration is cutting funding for R&D, withdrawing from WHO, and is populated with self-dealing idiots who, when something happens again, will make things worse than it was during the COVID crisis. Having a conspiracy theory believer in charge of HHS is beyond criminal.
—Frank Orienter

Much more aware of handwashing 🙂
—Nancy Brown

More meetings are virtual rather than in-person, which is a mixed blessing.
—Les Kernan

We're more tuned into and use the simple ways to minimize the spread of flu/cold. We see an N95 mask and know that person cares for our health.
—Tom Moughan

The pandemic profoundly reshaped my perspective on life, instilling a greater sense of purpose and urgency. I no longer postpone aspirations but instead approach every goal, dream, and idea with a clear plan for execution. I prioritize experiences that bring me joy, travel more frequently, and make a conscious effort to check in with friends and loved ones just to say I love you or appreciate you. This shift has reinforced the importance of living intentionally, embracing opportunities, and appreciating the present moment.
—Robyn Carter

Made me more cautious about ever being in large groups.
—Paul Bush

My husband and I already both freelanced, so we worked from home and we were used to solitary days filled with completing assignments. I had eight book contracts in hand for 2020 when the lockdown began, so I had plenty to keep me busy. We spent more time hiking and birding than we normally might, though these were also pastimes that we

pursued before the pandemic.
—Randi Minetor

I am now more sensitive to protecting others from germs/viruses I may be carrying.
—David Ross

No real change except that I am grateful for my health and wondering what the next pandemic will be.
—David Terp

We worked from our desk. As my husband was considered medically fragile from infection, I jokingly said I chained him to the wall. But he rarely went out. We used Zoom, I did the shopping, etc. As clergy, it was challenging.
—Joy Bergfalk

Aside from food collection mentioned above, the pandemic didn't change how I live. I am a "Covid virgin"; never had it.
—Karen Beadling

I'm living fairly unrestricted in society, moving through daily activities, traveling, eating out, etc. I do, however, pay attention to how COVID is spreading in various locations. I also get the annual COVID vaccine booster.
—Stephen L Gaudioso

I am now permanantly working from home; most of my calls are done via videophone; my work commute dropped from 30 minutes to 30 seconds upstairs to my office; savings as for car expenses.
—Daniel Mix

Much more use of technology to communicate. Even less trust of government. Learning how to embrace "the unknown" as part of daily life.
—Roy Allen

It heightened my senses for how my decision-making on behalf of my family can affect an entire community. We no longer send our kids back to school or daycare when they're still clearly sick (no more "toughing it out," which I realized does not cultivate a healthy relationship with our bodies or personal health). Pre-pandemic, there wasn't much education about how long we're contagious or shedding viruses after being actively ill, and while school policies stipulate that kids have to be fever free for 24 hours without medication before returning to school (and that may be a good measure to prevent other people from getting sick), that 24-hour period shouldn't be the max value on our rubric for measuring whether a child is well enough to go back to school! Our work lifestyles have had to change to accommodate this shift in community mindedness. I value flexibility and understanding with my work schedule to prioritize my family's needs above all else, which means I'm limited to remote-first employment options.
—Stephanie LaScala-Lodato

Made me less social.
—Sue Zornow

More meetings and events are now online rather than in person, so I go out somewhat less often than before the pandemic.
—Peter Collinge

I mask a lot more in crowded public spaces. I think about airborne illness a lot more when I'm with other people.
—Rick P. Teller

As a physician I dealt with how COVID killed many of my patients. I caught COVID early March 2020 and have chronic symptoms to this day. I strongly advise patients to vaccinate for their own good but also out of courtesy and respect for others. I try to teach and advise patients based on the facts, data and scientific evidence. What they do with it is their own decision and one they must live or die with.

—Jim Gaden

I'm more aware of sanitizing my hands after touching carts, doorknobs and the like.
—Rich Byers

I'm very aware that people's realities are different even if we've experienced the "same" things, and there's a need to be sensitive to that. Simply put, I've lost faith that our government will do what's best for it's citizens, for the world.
—Monique Patenaude

We do not go out of the house as much, are more isolated.
—Ned Corman

I am much more intentional about spending time with friends and family. It made me appreciate human connections and strive to forge community in more and meaningful ways.
—Rev. Rebecca Segers

I've become a hermit now because I haven't (knowingly) had COVID yet and the longer I can go without getting it, the better.

—Jessica Olin

I'm retired and live in a very rural area, things don't change much here.
—Bill Perkins

How confident are you that the U.S. public health system is prepared for a future pandemic?

Our public health system learned a lot during the pandemic but I am concerned that politics and bureaucracy will limit what we do with that knowledge.
—David Powe

There has been little response to bird flu. And our country is so divided. The pandemic has been politicized, people question science, and people became tired of precautions.
—Christine Farnum

This administration is ignoring H5N1 and the Senate is probably going to put a vaccine skeptic in charge of our health system.
—Ruth Yanoff

With the Republican administration's excessive slashing of funding for so many health-related functions, our ability to detect and prepare for a future pandemic has eroded dramatically, and will only get worse.
—Rose Ericson

As I said, the adverse federal govt fracturing of our CDC, NIH, HHS and withdrawal from WHO will cost lives!
—Jeffrey Allen

I think we have a good public health system. The question in my mind is whether the Trump administration will gut their funding or weaken their science-based approach. Or worse yet, work against their efforts as Trump did during the COVID epidemic by suggesting untested remedies, discouraging mask use and failing to vigorously promote vaccination.
—Kathy Lewis

Even before this current disaster of an administration, Covid was not prioritized as a significant health concern. Honestly, I believe corporate greed and a consumerist mindset will never allow us as a society to prioritize the health and wellbeing of ALL members of society.
—Emily Love

The leaders tagged now to head up HHS and its agencies are incompetent and, by and large, a clear and future danger to the public health of Americans.

—Sandy Mayer MD

Robert Kennedy Jr. has nothing to do with the medical profession yet he is in charge of the US health department, a lead agency not only in the US, but the world as well. Kennedy causes alarms and it's basically sickening to have him lead the department. Of course, where are the Democratic leaders to revolt against this move?
—Dennis P. Francione

My brother-in-law died on Thanksgiving night 2020, before vaccines were invented. My sister suffers with severe long-Covid. With the current adminstrative cult-members cancelling medical research, communications, collaboration with worldwide partners, I don't have much hope that we aren't going to see another, worse pandemic.
—Sarah Johnstone

I'm not at all confident because I'm watching the piecemeal, uncoordinated way the US has been responding to H5N1 transmission between a numbers of species across the country.
—Maria Evans

Trump administration seems to be bent on dismantling it.
—Lynn Braband

We are in a perilous position when it comes to readiness. Science has become a political issue and a weapon to demonize experts. Preventable illnesses are starting to re-emerge due to the paranoia around vaccines and the attitude around them is getting worse. Reducing funding will only put us in a worse spot when the next issue occurs.
—Chris Lindstrom

Generally, elected officials are loath to allocate limited funds toward something that may or may not happen. Like LA County, they want balanced budgets without causing "pain" to taxpayers, no matter how disastrous the unintended consequences of climate change or other unanticipated disasters will be. We live in a rapidly changing world, and nobody knows what risks we must face. Local governments rely on FEMA or HHS and federal assistance, but there will likely be none with the current administration. Dr. Fauci was a once-in-a-lifetime researcher, physician, and leader. He's being demonized by a mentally unstable president who wants to erase an unpleasant past and rewrite history where he is the hero. The administration, by emphasizing isolation, is setting the stage for an even more significant death toll by cutting aid to Third-World countries where all sorts of new diseases are incubating; they withdrew from WHO and defunded research to give billionaires tax breaks. Setting up a perfect environment for disease to spread and kill. Let's not forget about all the citizens still suffering from COVID-19. Incompetence kills. Oh, and just with the current flu and RSV and nursing home displacements, SMH ED was at 120% capacity; the whole health system will collapse should another pandemic occur.
—Frank Orienter

The chaos in the government leaves us all imperiled.
—Nancy Brown

The Elon/Donald team is gutting out the people and world network that saved us. I fear we're all now blind to emerging pandemics.
—Tom Moughan

I am not confident that we are prepared for a future pandemic, because our president flopped during the last time pandemic, and most likely will again due to a lack of belief in science.
—Robyn Carter

Trump and his appointment of Kennedy to run the health department is a scary joke. He is so anti-health care, it is scary.
—Mark Sutter

Our medical research system is amazing. I believe there will be another pandemic at some point in our future, and I have confidence that scientists in the pharmaceutical

industry will find solutions.
—B Hutchings

RFK Jr is not a fan of vaccines and has views that do not support our current health system which is in disarray. Trump just wants us to take horse medicine.
—Barbara Quinn

My confidence is somewhat diminished by the newly confirmed leadership in government.
—David Ross

RFK, Jr. is totally unqualified to be HHS secretary. If he is confirmed, we are in trouble.
—Miriam Rudnick

It is impossible to be very prepared for such an eventuality, although we are better prepared if it is a respiratory illness.
—David Terp

I am much less confident with this presidential administration and RFK, Jr. in charge of health!
—Joy Bergfalk

With the current administration gutting the NIH/CDC, appointing an unqualified Secretary, and with the looming Bird Flu out west; we are in for another rude awakening.
—Molly Snyder

If the future pandemic occurs during Trump's reign, I would not be confident of preparation at all. His successors' preparations would be handicapped by his failure.
—Karen Beadling

I'm only somewhat confident in our preparedness for a future pandemic because the current administration is working to dismantle our health care system and the funding for research. So, even though there are capable, creditable medical leaders who are aware of the consequences of a future pandemic, they are likely to be significantly hampered in their efforts to combat it.
—Stephen L. Gaudioso

I am concerned with the attacks on CDC, NIH, and other health authorities; questionable leaders such as Robert Kennedy being considered; the antivaxxers are going amok.
—Daniel Mix

We—collectively—are way too reactive rather than proactive in our healthcare efforts. COVID-19 like many other public health crises could have been avoided if more controls were put on the scientists. To paraphrase Ronald Reagan, government is not always the solution, whether that be in a state-supported lab in Wuhan, China, or a Medicare/Medicaid funded long term care facilities in the New York. A health care system that generates billions of dollars in profits by herding vulnerable people into nursing homes may not be the best way to prevent mass contagion when problems like COVID-19 rear their ugly heads.
—Roy Allen

Not confident anymore with the federal staff cuts; dissolution of key government departments, partnerships, and organizations; and shifting of focus away from sharing essential to public health data. We're teetering on the edge of another potential pandemic with the bird flu and our own government's budget cuts are preventing people from protecting us and sharing information. Scary stuff.
—Stephanie LaScala-Lodato

Seems the public health system will be in a shambles.
—Sue Zornow

The current federal administration's anti-government, anti-tax, and anti-science beliefs will severely damage the already inadequate public health system.
—Peter Collinge

The erosion of trust in public institutions, such as the CDC & NIH, does not strengthen them. We're all in this together. The sooner we reach that common ground, the sooner our society can heal (literally AND figuratively).

—Rick P. Teller

The same stable genius is back in control of the White House along with his minions who do not believe in vaccines. This is a recipe for disaster. Trump has cut off communication from federal health agencies so we are in the dark as to what diseases are prevalent. Republicans love to starve the beast by defunding programs they dislike. Public health will get whacked as they try to prepare for the next $2 trillion tax brake for corporations and billionaires.
—Jim Gaden

The current administration was very slow at tackling the health issue. They are not supportive of the WHO and the CDC.
—Rich Byers

Under the current administration, the CDC is being defanged, with research removed from its website and information about the bird flu and other outbreaks hidden. The prevalence—and even support of—disinformation leaves the country in challenging circumstances should another pandemic occur.
—Rev. Rebecca Segers

COVID happened initially during the tenure of the current president. How would things be different this time?

—Jessica Olin

System was not prepared for a pandemic like this. It was a somewhat new situation, and it had been a long time since we had such a pandemic. Supplies needed were not available enough if I remember correctly. I don't know how prepared we are today.
—Ellen Lerner

With Presidents Musk and Trump dismantling the federal government, how can anyone believe that the US can be prepared for the next pandemic?
—Len Sheldon

Idiots in government, all of them.
—Bill Perkins

Paul Ericson (mailto:paul.ericson@rochesterbeacon.com) is Rochester Beacon executive editor.

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